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THE  
CASE OF SERVIA.

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THE  
CASE OF SERVIA.

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It is notorious at the present day, to those who are ever so little initiated in the political affairs of Europe, that the solution of the grave question of the East is principally, if not solely, retarded by the policy which England pursues in those regions. This policy, up to the present day, has been the maintenance, at all risks and price, of the domination of the Turks in Europe. It is the attitude of England which is the principal cause of that dangerous agitation and effervescence, which acts upon Europe as a continual menace. The most fertile countries of this quarter of the world, those most favoured by Providence for the development of commerce and of industry, are in consequence condemned to languish in poverty and barbarism; whilst the twelve millions of people which inhabit them are condemned to share the fate imposed upon their soil. There is no circumstance more afflicting in the history of humanity, than the determination of a people so eminently liberal and Christian, and which so justly boasts to be

at the head of civilization, to support non-Christians against Christians, and barbarism against progress, and thus perpetuate a race, which, during the four-and-a-half centuries of its domination in Europe, has founded or accomplished nothing for either arts or sciences, but, on the contrary, has devastated and destroyed the lands which they have conquered, and, brutalizing the Christian populations, so highly endowed by nature, have rendered their once prosperous regions a complete desert.

When the Government of a great and enlightened people pursues a policy in opposition to its political and religious principles, and to the part which it is called to play in the world, one is induced at first to believe that it is influenced by considerations of a higher order than those which it disregards. This, however, cannot be said or thought of the Oriental policy of England. The most minute and impartial scrutiny would fail to discover any moral or material interests that could be adduced to justify that policy. On the contrary, the interests of a country so essentially commercial and industrial, its position in the East, as well as the duties imposed upon a Christian and civilizing Power, naturally suggest and demand a totally different line of political conduct. There is certainly no Power—no country in the world

—which would gain so much from the disappearance of Turkish domination in Europe as England would. The day on which the bonds which retain the East in its secular lethargy shall have been broken ; when Mussulman superstition shall be replaced by the religious principles of the Christian, and the indolence of the Asiatic by the activity of the European ; when the fertile lands of those countries, so long waste, shall teem with produce, and their river-harbours become the trading-ports for which nature has destined them ; when subject races, restored to freedom and their natural development, shall receive and fructify the inventions and ideas of their more advanced brethren of the West of Europe, is one of which it is impossible to over-estimate the importance and the glory to England. For whom would those splendid markets open more than for her ? Whose manufactured products would be exchanged and consumed for the natural ones of the Levant ? Who would be the banker, the capitalist, the profitable vivifier of those regions, barren and unknown at present, because trodden down ? Whose ideas and whose influence would prevail, whose principles be adopted, whose friendship courted, but those of that country which can best aid the Christian provinces to emerge from their misery to freedom and to light ? “ England ! ” is

the only answer to all these questions. And this, for her, is the most solid and glorious of gains and conquests to which a great nation can aspire.

These truths have not, indeed, escaped the practical view and the commercial instinct of British statesmen. As England has always conducted its trade with the Levant through the intermediary of the Christian subjects of Turkey, it knows that these, so valuable as agents, would be still more so as the free members of a Christian State, and under Governments exempt from the corruption or imbecility of the Turks. It is impossible, therefore, for them to consider the emancipation and independence of the Christians as other than favourable to British commerce.

But another device is adopted, another plea put forward. And this is, that the preservation of Turkey is indispensable to the European balance of power, as a barrier against the ambition of Russia in the East. There cannot be a greater error. For how is it possible to conceive that a Power which is continually creating embarrassments, and which perpetually places the different States of Europe at variance, can be conducive to the peace, and conservative of the balance of Europe? How fatuitous is it to seek in weakness what can be only found in strength, or to trust to a Government unable to defend itself! Turkey is but a



field of either battle or intrigue to attract its enemies, instead of being a bulwark to deter or keep them off.

It is, certainly, not by maintaining, on the frontier of Russia, a Turkey weak and necessarily divided, that England can hope to check Russian ambition, or compel it to renounce its selfish views upon the East. The weakness of Turkey however, it may be said, will be supplied and supported by the artificial means of alliances. History has not left us ignorant of the force and solidity of such a stay. We know with what difficulty alliances are maintained, and how little they can be relied on. We have seen how short a time they survive the necessity which created them, and how soon, in politics, the friends of yesterday become the enemies of to-day. We need go no further, for an example, than that very alliance out of which sprung the last Turkish War. Where is it, and what have been its results?

But the last argument, and that upon which most stress is laid by the unreasoning supporters of Turkey, is that the emancipation of the Christians, and the formation of States professing that faith, can only turn to the advantage of Russia. The people of Turkey in Europe, whether Slave or orthodox, have no other desire, it is alleged, than that of uniting themselves to Russia. To favour them, therefore, is

merely to procure subjects and soldiers for the Czar. This, no doubt, is the most deep-rooted and fundamental of all those errors which direct the policy of England in the Levant. It is, moreover, the greatest calumny that could be invented against the Slaves of Turkey, and especially against the Serbs. Those who first started, and those who repeat it, are utterly ignorant of the feelings and aspirations of that people, with whom the first thought and the most cherished boon is nationality. An independent nationality is what they prize, and are known to prize, above everything on earth. Why then suppose them to be capable of such a suicide? Besides, the absurdity of it is shown by the very nature of things. Here is a people with an historic existence, a glorious past, of which every man of them is proud. Through centuries of prolonged and severe foreign tyranny, their populations have clung to and preserved the desire for independence. Can any one imagine that, just as they are about to reap the fruit of their constancy and courage, these people would abdicate and fling away what has been ever dearest to them, and would, at the eleventh hour, stoop to exchange merely one foreign master for another?—that instead of Turks they would become Russians, and enjoy the advantage of seeing their sons carried off as recruits to Siberia or

the Caucasus ? 'There is, really, no answering ignorance and malice sufficiently profound to make such an accusation. We must leave it to all or to any who have visited the Lower Danube, or have heard the national song of the Serb, to declare the folly of such a charge—the absurdity of such a supposition.

Russia is far better informed on these subjects. Well aware how profound is the national sentiment of the Serbs, and how attached the race is to its tongue, its history, and its existence, so long independent, Russia knows well that it is only by favouring the national aspirations, and by supporting them, that she can awaken sympathy and win influence for herself. Russia knows well, that the moment she should display any selfish or ambitious views, hostile to the nationality of these countries, her influence would be lost, and gratitude itself converted into irreconcilable hatred. If Russia has found friends and sympathizers amongst the Slaves, it is not that any one of them has ever entertained the idea of becoming Russian, but because they think they have found in the Czar the enemy of their oppressor, and the protector of their nationality and of their faith. This is the whole secret—this the utmost extent of the feeling for Russia amongst the Serbs.

It will be seen at once that the influence thus gained

by Russia over the Christian races is anything but exclusive. The same kindness, the same protection, held out to them by other Powers, would win from the whole Slavic race a gratitude far more free from mistrust. But if Russia alone comes forward with the helping hand, how is it to be supposed that the Christians would reject it, and not make use of it as a political mainstay against Turkish menace and aggression ?

We will not disguise the fact, that there is danger for the Christian races, as there is impolicy on the part of the Liberal Powers of Europe, thus to leave the Slaves exclusively indebted to Russia, and compelled to be her clients. The main cause which ties the Slavic race to such a Protectorate is the ill-will of England, and the determined antagonism displayed by the policy of that country towards the Christians of the East. England, by persisting in this error, and by acting as though she believed that the Slaves of Turkey are but the vanguard of Russia, may force them in time to become so. When a nation is reduced to despair, what may it not have recourse to ? It is for Englishmen to prevent the Slavonian Christians from such a madness, by adopting a more liberal policy towards their brother-Christians struggling for existence.

There can be but few persons at the present day who still entertain illusions respecting the vitality of the Turks, or the possibility of long maintaining their domination in Europe. We have but to consider the totally unimproved and deplorable state of Turkish administration, and of the provinces which it affects to govern, with the ever-recurring troubles and insurrections, stifled in one spot but to break out in another, and stifled too, almost always, by foreign resources and aid, and we shall be compelled to see in these the last throes of a dying empire? The Turkish Government cannot pacify, settle, or reform. One has but to regard for an instant the working of its Government, to be assured that it is a race about to disappear—an empire about to perish.

The demise of Turkey, sooner or later, being once admitted as inevitable, there are but two modes of solving the great Eastern Question which must then arise—the one, a partition of Turkey between the Great Powers; the other, the leaving it to its natural heirs, which form the overwhelming portion of the population. A partition of Turkey between the Powers of Europe would be an utter impossibility: their own declarations of the immorality of such a proceeding would preclude it. How could jarring pretensions be reconciled, or how could the interests of all be

guarded? The second hypothesis becomes thus the only one to be contemplated, as that which alone is honourable, feasible, and just.

There are three races in Turkey,—the Slavic race (which is the most numerous), the Greek, and the Rouman races. These three are represented by three small States, the Kingdom of Greece, the Principality of Servia, and that of Wallachia and Moldavia. In the two former the whole of the Christians of the peninsula of European Turkey see the nucleus of future kingdoms. The complete emancipation of the whole of these three races of Eastern Europe surely ought to be a source of satisfaction to the rest of the people of Europe. Instead then of having on the frontier of Russia, herself an object of continual distrust, a barbarous empire in the last stage of decrepitude, the Western Powers would find their natural allies in the three Confederate States of Greece, of Servia, and of Roumania (Moldo-Wallachia), with a population even at present of more than sixteen millions. These three states, full of youthful vigour, and rapidly advancing in all the arts of civilization, will then occupy the whole of that portion of Europe, and will dissipate those fears which at times disturb the mind of the Western Powers. All feel that the power of Russia consists not so much in her own inherent

strength as in the weakness of the neighbouring state of Turkey. When that weakness shall have passed away, and the frontiers of Russia shall be occupied by a strong nation, a barrier will have been erected which will check and set bounds to the ambition of Russia.

These things, no doubt, are not done in a day. But, with a proper tendency and fair protection, things would naturally take this course; and by favouring the development and independence of these Christian States, Europe would pursue the true path towards a peaceable solution of the great Eastern difficulty. All other solutions can lead but to sanguinary war, and a flinging back both of Europe and of the East into anarchy.

When England fully recognises this truth she will surely not use her great strength to prevent its triumph. No consideration, no interests, can be suggested which should arrest this consummation. On the contrary, as I have already shown, everything invites England to assist in the complete emancipation of the oppressed Christians of Turkey. England, more than any other of the great Powers, will be the gainer by the establishment of a state of prosperity and of security in the East. It is her capital which will find an ever-profitable investment in the rich soil of Eastern Europe. It will be the productions of her

industry, and of her manufactories, which will supply the market of these countries; it will be her civilization, more than that of any other nation, which will print the marks of its own solidity upon the people of the East. And in thus gaining, both morally and materially, England will, at the same time, merit the thanks of the human race, by rescuing millions of her fellow-Christians from the oppressive and degrading yoke which now weighs them to the earth. The great stake which England has in the East requires that these provinces should be at peace. But England will not find that peace so long as these provinces are under the dominion of the Turks. She requires also a firm barrier against the progress of Russia in the East—this cannot be, so long as Turkey remains feeble. The ambition of the great Northern Power cannot be curbed by an alliance between the decrepitude of Turkey and the might of England, but it will be effectually controlled by a people strong in the sense of their own freedom, jealous of their national independence, and ready to dare and endure all dangers rather than submit to the yoke of a foreign Power.

As to the capacity of the Christian provinces to subsist, defend, and organize themselves, which some might be disposed to call in question, we can appeal



to what these races have done during the last thirty years. With scarcely any aid from without, but merely by their own energy, they have all established their virtual independence.

Should, however, England persist in her present policy of maintaining the power of barbarian Turkey over the Christian provinces, it may adjourn, but cannot prevent the final catastrophe. And as that approaches, England will find herself more and more isolated, more and more behind the rest of Europe, since every other Power has assumed a more liberal and more sensible policy in the East than the superannuated one to which England still clings. Even Austria, which alone has hitherto supported England's illiberal tendencies, cannot fail to abandon them as constitutional ideas and popular tendencies more and more prevail. Were Austria to do otherwise, and were she to persist in aiding to rivet the chains of the Slaves within the Turkish provinces, the Slaves within her own territory would resent and punish the sacrilege. During the recent deplorable events in Servia, numbers of petitions, from various parts of the Austrian Empire, were addressed to the Emperor, entreating him to modify his policy with regard to Turkey and its Christian subjects. The Austrian Government cannot be deaf to such just and natural

demands. The English public are not yet sufficiently well-informed, to make similar protests against the policy of their Government in the Levant. Were this not the case, it cannot be doubted but that England, free and Christian as she is, would shrink from being the only Power ready under all circumstances to uphold an empire whose fall has become a necessity, and is synonymous with the advance of civilization, of commerce, and of Christianity. The people of this country, however, will surely no longer allow the provinces of European Turkey to accuse England of barring the way against all progress, and of hindering that prosperity to which Providence has evidently destined them. Will the people of England endure any longer the strange contradiction which exists at present between the policy of her Government and the generous instinct of the nation? Shall the one rejoice at the freedom of Poland and of Italy, whilst the other aids in the maintenance of wrong, and of oppression, in Turkey? Is it just, is it to be endured, that the power of England, which is the result of the freedom of her sons, should be converted into an instrument of oppression to the people of Bosnia, of Bulgaria, and of Servia?